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Book review.

Eno Koꞔo: Traditional Songs and Music of the Korꞔe Region of Albania.

When I visited Albania for the first time, I was surprised when I heard wonderful Greek *bouzouki* *rebetiko* songs renowned in Greece, from a pair of heavy loudspeakers in the central square of Korçë, an Albanian street seller had put them on. It was only after reading Eno Koꞔo’s book that I realized how far back the Albanian people’s love of the Greek bouzouki went. In one of my later journeys to Albania around 2000 and afterwards, I was struck at the way the Albanian people in the little towns of Southern Albania enjoyed a waltz and tango dance tradition in their everyday entertainment inside local restaurants or at family feasts. A thriving cosmopolitan social life from the past unfolded before my eyes. This small-scale cosmopolitanism was apparently uninterrupted by the years of political isolation or rather the persistence of this cosmopolitanism lasted through political isolation.

The little town of Korꞔë or the legendary “Korytsa” in Greek, or “Kortšauă” for the Vlachs, a place where the mutual affiliation of the Greek Epirots with the Southern Albanian people affirmed their common past, was a thriving small city where cosmopolitanism, tradition and education met each other in the way unfolded in the narrative of this book. A town that (no matter the contradictions due to the final formation of the Albanian borders in the Balkan Wars and World War I), embraced its Greek Epirot communities and welcomed the Greek Army in World War II , with a shared enthusiasm honoring its fight and triumphs against Mussolini’s fascist attacks in the Balkans.

After many years of no relations between Greece and Albania due to the dictatorship that governed the country this book reveals the musical culture of a place that used to be a great cultural center in Southern Albania.

In the pages of this book a small-scale cosmopolitanism is described that does not deny tradition while keeping an eye on new trends and at the same time adapts what is familiar, personal and characteristic in new ideas, so as to contribute to further improvement. The people of Korꞔë experienced their own experiential community life and time. Korꞔë is a small town which keeps its provincial traditions while adopting new music. This was the characteristic of the towns of the 20th century, or many towns of the Ottoman Empire which continued the thriving life and small-scale cosmopolitanism of their provincial but at the same urban experiential cosmopolitanism from their Byzantine past, sometimes in difficult circumstances.

In order to reveal this process of small-scale musical cosmopolitanism in such a provincial urban center Koꞔo uses three different methodologies:

The first is a methodology performed in Ethnomusicology including fieldwork and interviews with the families of distinguished personalities that contributed to the musical life of the Town of Korꞔë in Albania or abroad. The other is historical musicological research, looking at different historical sources including bibliography, archives, newspapers and other data like musical scores, early recordings or photographic material. All this data is found in the chapters of this book.

Last but not least is musical analysis. Koꞔo reveals the different transformations of musical characteristics hidden in the repertory at different stages of the musical life of the little town showing the ways historical data and the historical process described in the pages of this book are depicted inside musical form.

While dipping into the historical past of the town of Korꞔë and its musical life as well as the musical compositions found in scores or recordings, Koꞔo classifies the urban musical creation of the town of Korꞔë into three main categories:

The first is what he calls “The Urban Song Tradition of Korꞔë”. This is an urban tradition that is based on the one hand on the pentatonic provincial Epirot tradition which in some cases becomes bilingual (both Albanian and Greek), while on the other hand it assimilates maqam traditions that derive from the Ottoman Courts (in Jannina for example). But as Koꞔo notes, these urban songs which in many cases are love songs and are widespread in many towns or present similarities from town to town , (for example the songs of Jannina and Korꞔë) are not direct products of a Middle Eastern influence. Most of them have commonalities with some Eastern element although in an Epirotic singing tradition, or the other way round: some Western elements are also found due to the influence of Greek Kefallonian songs. The local carriers of traditions assimilated the Eastern maqam tradition to make a personal musical mood which is local though at the same time cosmopolitan.

Another important contribution to the formation of the Korꞔë urban tradition and 20th century urban music in Albania was the instrumental bands called *Saze*. This might mean the kind of instruments but essentially it meant the semi-professional wandering musicians who were flexible and could experience and transfer different repertories to the areas they moved in. At the same time they kept the polyphonic tradition of the provinces in a more urban way. The instrumental groups developed the pure provincial vocal experiential style in a semi-professional way. A similar phenomenon in Greece was the instrumental *Koumpaneia*.

The third category is the “Urban Lyric Song”. The main characteristic of this category is the training of the musicians and singers in notated music. The “Urban Lyric Song” is part of an educational musical lyric song style which intervenes in the small towns inspiring their experiential powers. It keeps some traditional Eastern or local Epirot characteristics but it orientates to Europeanization.

These three urban traditions along with the *Kefallonitika* and the *Kantadha* of the Greek Ionian islands are major factors in the creation of what is called “Korꞔare distinctive song”. These last two styles (*Kefallonitika* and *Kantadha*) affect the Korꞔare song because of the affiliation of the local Albanian population with the Greek musical styles developed in the Ionian islands. These traditions brought the *mantolinata* to Korꞔë and later bouzouki style instruments. They were blended again with the local traditions and due to the experiential cultural and social life in the *sokaks* (the stone made pedestrian routes of the town) of Korꞔë and the *Pareas* (“company” in Greek) they developed as a special local musical style which became a local oral tradition named “Korꞔare distinctive song”.

The rise of nationalism but in a more local community-based sensitive patriotic sense in this case, gave new insights to certain personalities that developed both entertainment and patriotic Albanian songs.

The next chapter of the book is dedicated to the distinguished though neglected personality of *Thoma Nassi* and his contribution to the popularization of the *Korꞔare distinctive song* with his *Vatra* band: his compositions were widespread in Albania and America. His compositions again pay tribute to the local pentatonic style or to the Eastern style as well as to Western traditions freely elaborated with various harmonies and orchestration.

Finally, Eno Koꞔo refers to the personality of *Neꞔo Muko*, an extraordinary musician, and his contribution to the elaboration of the local polyphonic style of the *Himara* region. Professionalism as a kind of urbanization of these styles was part of their popularity and rewarded them with even more popularity by means of certain personalities of the musical life of the provincial towns of Southern Albania.

The main texts of the chapters are accompanied by 39 (thirty nine) notated examples representative of the different categories of the musical repertory.

Eno Koꞔo’s book is a space-specific ethnomusicological and historical musicological approach, a work that clarifies the process of an experiential musical creativity over time, in an historical long-lived urban center of the Southern Balkans.